

**Archaeological Survey of the
Wildhorse Vista Subdivision,
Bexar County, Texas**

By

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted a pedestrian archaeological survey of 60.6 acres or Unit 1 of Wildhorse Vista Subdivision on March 30, 2005. The survey was conducted for First American Commercial Property Group of San Antonio, Texas in compliance with the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Division. Construction fill was being applied to the southern portion of the property at the time of the survey and approximately one fifth of the landscape had been covered with about one meter of fill. Visibility and subsurface exposures were good for the remaining property. No intact cultural materials, deposits or historic structures were encountered. The proposed land modification will have no significant impact on archaeological and historical resources in the project area.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted a pedestrian archaeological survey of 60.6 acres of Wildhorse Vista Subdivision by the senior author on March 30, 2005. The survey was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to assess the significance of the site regarding consideration for nomination to National Register of Historic Places. The assessment will consist of a 100% surface inspection and, if necessary, shovel tests to inspect for buried intact deposits.

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the time of the survey and approximately one-fifth of the landscape had been covered with about one meter of fill. Visibility and subsurface exposures were good for the remaining property.

The property is divided by an intermittent tributary of Culebra Creek in far western Bexar County. The land mostly low-lying, sloping gently (1 to 3 percent) toward the creek on both sides, and the acreage along the creek is subject to periodic flooding and marshy conditions during wet periods. The one exception is an upland finger that extends onto the property at the northwest corner. It is here that the foundation of the raised farm house (shown in Figure 1) was observed. There are no springs or permanent sources of water in or near the development property.

According to the *Soil Survey of Bexar County* (Taylor et al. 1962), the proposed development lies entirely within the Lewisville Series soils (ibid.:25). This series includes alluvial deposits on terraces and terrace slopes on major streams and tributaries. Lewisville soils have been used extensively for farming and pasture, but it is subject to erosion that must be controlled. Specifically, the soils in the area surveyed are “Lewisville silty clay, 1 to 3 percent slopes,” abbreviated hereafter as LvB (Taylor et al. 1962:25). The upper part of the soils are about 2 ft thick, consisting of dark grayish brown silty clay. Underlying the upper unit is a subsurface layer of crumbly brown clay, described as “limy,” about 1.5 ft thick. Underlying some Lewisville soils are deep beds of rounded limestone gravels, although it is unclear from the *Soil Survey* if such gravels are present at the development locale.

Archaeological Background

More than 1400 archaeological sites have been recorded in Bexar County, including many in northwest San Antonio. One of the most significant prehistoric sites recorded thus far was Pavo Real (41BX52) located at Highway 1604 and Leon Creek. This site uncovered prehistoric occupation dating back to the Late Pleistocene Clovis period about 13,000 years ago (Collins et al., 2003). Another significant prehistoric site was located where Culebra Creek crosses Highway (Nickels et al. 1998). This site

yielded information that dates back to 6000 years ago.. Other important sites have been investigated in the Salado Creek watershed (Black and McGraw 1985; Black et al., 1998), under Soil Conservation Service designs for numerous floodwater retarding structures along the edge of the Balcones Escarpment. Nearer to the project area and to its north, there have been extensive archaeological studies at the Government Canyon State Natural Area by Texas Parks and Wildlife (McNatt et al., 2000). Sites date from Late Paleoindian (ca. 10,000-8,500 years ago), along with many sites, including burned rock middens, of the Archaic era (ca. 8,500-1,500 years ago) and others of Late Prehistoric age (1,500-500 years ago).

Long- term studies of both prehistory and historic settlement have also been carried out for almost 30 years at Camp Bullis, with various research efforts by The University of Texas at San Antonio, Prewitt and Associates of Austin, and other entities under the overview of the Fort Worth District of the Corps of Engineers (e.g., Boyd et al. 1989). Overall, lands within the boundary of the City of San Antonio contain perhaps the most densely concentrated archaeological zone in the United States, and have a continuous archaeological record extending from the time of the first peopling of Texas ca. 13,000 years ago up to the present time.

Sites closest to the Wildhorse Vista area were recorded by noted avocational archaeologist, the late C. K. Chandler (data online at the Texas Archeological Site Atlas). Site 41BX709, along Culebra Creek, is a burned rock midden, probably dating to the Archaic, although no time-diagnostic artifacts were found. At 41BX710, also on Culebra Creek, Chandler documented burned rock middens and a variety of stone artifacts dating from Late Archaic to Late Prehistoric times. A historic home of cut limestone was recorded as 41BX711. This is apart of the old Charles Hoffman Ranch, located on the M. M. Muzquiz Spanish land grant, Survey 80. The historic house and associated ranch-related materials were situated on a low ridge that paralleled the west side of Culebra Creek. Chandler's sites are typical of the archaeological record of this part of Bexar County, including numerous burned rock middens (most of which have been damaged or destroyed by artifact-digging), terrace sites (such as Pavo Real noted above), and historic

ranch and farm homes dating to the 19th century (detailed in Shafer and Hester 2005:2-4). The latter have also suffered greatly, diminishing our understanding of the early settlement of Bexar County.

Putting these comments into context, we can use the large inventory of archaeological sites in Bexar County as a resource for predicting site locations. Our current knowledge of prehistoric landscape use and settlement patterns based on previous surveys in Bexar and surrounding counties allows some prediction as to where buried archaeological deposits might occur. Buried deposits hold the most promising potential for yielding the most informative archaeological sites. Such deposits are more likely to occur along alluvial terraces of spring-fed creeks, although they are not necessarily restricted to alluvial terraces. Upland headwater intermittent drainages without permanent springs are considered low potential for buried campsite deposits, but may yield important traces of specific activities such as food processing or raw material procurement. This low probability situation for upland drainages does not hold, however, for historic structures. Upland alluvial soils were targets for 19th century farmsteads and traces of historic settlements are not uncommon throughout Bexar County. All properties should be inspected for both prehistoric and historic sites, or the remains of historic structures, even if the structures themselves no longer exist.

Survey Results

The property that had not been covered with fill was inspected for prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. About 20% of the area was covered with fill at the time of the survey (Fig. 2), leaving about 80% open for inspection. The area surveyed was mostly covered in grass, but ample opportunities to examine the surface and subsurface deposits was provided by surface disturbances from dozer activity and subsurface exposures in the form of bore holes. Therefore, shovel tests were unnecessary. The dark brown clay Lewisville (LvB) soils that dominate in the project area yielded no sign of prehistoric landscape use. This negative finding was expected, given the low-lying landscape and absence of seasonal or permanent water.

The foundation of a raised late historic farmhouse was located in the northwest corner of the property. This poured concrete foundation and a standing (utility?)

outbuilding is all that remains of the farm. The farmhouse is shown with a red roof in Figure 1 but was not present when the aerial map used for the soil survey ca. 1962 was flown (Fig. 3). Steve Frost noted that photos taken in 1966 also did not show a structure, but buildings did appear in 1977. Photo evidence clearly shows the farm house to have been post 1950. Consulting engineer Lee Wright (with TCB W.F. Castella, Inc.) stated that two years ago the farm was occupied and the people were in raising emus or ostrich. Traces of the large bird pens were also observed; these too are visible in Figure 1. Also seen in Figure 1 is the image of what appears to have been a race track of some kind. Field inspection identified the traces of this feature in the vegetation, but no physical remains were observed.

Assessment

No prehistoric or historic archaeological sites were found in the survey. The only historic structure recorded during the survey was constructed after 1966. Therefore, it is our assessment that the proposed land modification will have no significant impact on archaeological and historical resources in the project area.

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Figures



Figure 1. Aerial view of the project area showing the location of the raised farm house (image provided by Steve Frost, Frost GeoSciences, Inc.).



Figure 2. Construction fill covering approximately 20% of the project area (photo provided by Steve Frost, Frost GeoSciences, Inc.).



Figure 3. Soil survey image taken ca. 1962 shows the property to be covered with vegetation. The ranch house shown in Figure 1 was not constructed at this time (from Taylor et al., 1962: Sheet Number 34).